

Montana National Guard

EXHIBIT 6
DATE 1/5/11
RE NA



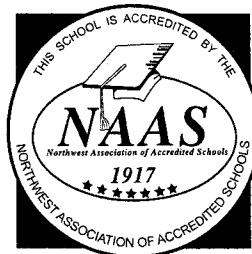
Youth Challenge

"A better Montana, one youth at a time!"

www.youthchallenge.mt.gov

1-877-FOR-MYCP

*Challenge
Testimony
Success stories
Jon Rouse
Director*





Trudy Chester
2110 Ridgeview Dr.
Billings, MT 59105



MT. Youth Challenge

Thanks for your help with my Grand Daughter Kyla Mallett. She has just finished her last test for the Semester. I believe her Mother said most of her grades we A's. She has really changed and most of all finds time for Both of us Grandmothers. We loved having her around again.

My deepest Thanks,

Trudy
Chester



Dear Staff,

Thank you for all that you have done while I was there at the youth challenge I do not know how to show my appreciation I have for you all putting in your time and effort to get class twenty -two to graduate. I wondered if There were times when the staff all wanted to give up on us and never come back to work again. But you came everyday on time . And helped each of us out individually.

Now I am working at a grocery store and am having a lot of fun there interacting with different characters and saving money for college. I plan to go to University of Western next year in the fall I just turned twenty July 3. And I am still working on the last section of my GED

I could not have graduated without all of the CI's, Teacher's and Counselors helping us along the way . There were times when I felt like giving up instead I swallowed my pride and tried my best.

My family was very proud of me. And I am glad that I got to spend the last six months with all of wonderful people there at the M.y.c.a. .I will never forget the great experience I evoked on with you all. I wish you all luck for the next cycle and again Thank-you for putting in the time to believe in us.

And if you need a guest speaker for the next cycle You can call or email me
(406) 388-3078 amandagrevo@yahoo.com



December 8, 2010

100 12/12/10

Dear Alyxs,

I just wanted to send you a photo of Stephen. This is his graduation picture from basic training. He completed his training on November 12, 2010 in Ft. Benning, Georgia.

He has really reached all of the goals he set for himself! You were a part in that and I am so thankful that you took the time to teach him and that you cared whether he made it or not. Thank you! I know it's not easy being a teacher.

I am thankful for you and for all of the instructors there, you all showed Stephen that he had the potential to make his dreams come true, because you know I'm his mom and I'm supposed to say those things! ☺ I really liked that everything I said to encourage him was also what some instructor said as well. It was like you all were taking up where I left off and reinforced what we all here at home knew! THANK YOU!

Have a Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,



Pam Mitchell, the proud mother of Stephen Mitchell

January 7, 2010

Dear Montana Youth Challenge Program,

Hi my name Kyla Mollett and I am a past cadet that went through the Challenge Program in January of 2009 to June of 2009. I graduated your program with very good grades and I also received the \$2000 scholarship from Merrill Lynch. I appreciate the opportunity I was given at MYCP and it has helped me succeed and become a better person all around. The scholarship also helped immensely with my payments for my first semester at MSU-Billings. I received a passing grade on a one credit study class, and A+ in a math course, an A in a religious quest class, a B in my psychology course, and I am retaking my writing class which I sadly failed due to missing too much class because I had Mono for a month or so. I just wanted to thank you and your program for giving me the tools I needed to be successful in school and in life in general. I have a totally different outlook on life now, and I appreciate everything that I have. I am continuing my schooling at MSUB and am majoring in Mathematics. My grandmother had sent in a donation and was talking to the director I do believe and was told that there are other scholarships available to me. If that is at all possible I would be very grateful. Once again I thank you for everything you have done for me, I thank all the sergeants that had to put up with my crap for five and a half months (What's up Sergeant Walker!) and everyone that knew I could be the best I could be.

Peace and Much Love!!

Cadet Kyla Mollett (class 20!)



948 Ahoy Ave

Billings, MT 59105

406-256-0064

kkkz@bresnan.net



SAKURA

WARRIOR ARTS

JUDO
柔道

JUJITSU
柔術

KARATE
空手

255 S.W Higgins

• Missoula, Montana 59803

• (406) 728-8187

December 25, 2008

Dear General Walsh,

We would like to express our most sincere thanks and deepest gratitude to you for your commencement address to the nineteenth graduating class of the MT Youth ChalleNGe Program.

December 20, 2008 will be a day our entire family will remember with the greatest memories as our youngest son and brother, Ty C. Harrison, showed the world, and more importantly himself, what he is made of. We were so happy to see Ty walk down that aisle, not once, but numerous times and to see the pride on his face for his accomplishments; accomplishments that were entirely in his own power to obtain. Thanks to the wonderful ChalleNGe program and the many staff that lead this program to success twice a year, Ty was able to view himself in a different light and "rise to the top from the beginning and stay there". Those were the words spoken to us by Commandant Tim Hansen, who selected Ty as the recipient of the Commandant's Award of Class XIX.

General, your last two comments in your address to encourage our youth and, we feel, especially our son, will remain in our hearts forever. To go forth and LEAD others in a productive path and never lose sight of those who will always love and support you, your FAMILIES. Those words meant more to us than you will ever know!! As the loving and giving supporters of Ty in the months at ChalleNGe, it was good to hear you give credit to the family unit.

In closing, if not for ChalleNGe, Ty would have still been spiraling downward in drugs and alcohol and very possibly suicide. We would salute the birth of this program for our youth of Montana and we would salute you for your words to carry them through the rest of their lives. Last, but far from least, our additional thanks and gratitude goes to Col. (Ret.) Ike Slaughter for telling us about ChalleNGe and offering to be our son's mentor. He has unfailingly given long hours of work and support for Ty and has treated Ty like a son. Col. Slaughter's work will continue for the next year as he guides Ty in his choice of a military career. Words truly can't express the depth of gratitude we feel! Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Carolyn Harrison

Jim and Carolyn Harrison, Valkyrie, Tania & Thor
7705 Moe Road
Lolo, MT 59847

Willow Planting in Bell Canyon

David Abrams, Western Montana District

Youth joined experience as nearly a dozen employees from the Dillon Field Office and members of Montana's Youth Challenge teamed up to help repair a damaged riparian area in Bell Canyon, about a 90-minute drive from Dillon.

The two teens--Reed Pitman from Deer Lodge and Bryan Nutting from Joliet--spent the day with the BLM crew planting 800 willows along an ice-cold, crystal-clear mountain stream. The group also helped improve the "architecture" of the creek by shaping it with downed branches and streamside rocks.

"Initially, we were going to build fences to protect the riparian area, but now our Plan B is to allow this place to rest for four years, treat it for cheatgrass, and plant willows, allowing the stream to heal," said Pat Fosse, Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources, as she helped the others dig holes for the willows.

"This stream is in a steep, narrow canyon and is the only water source in a large pasture," she added. "It has been heavily impacted by past livestock grazing practices. New livestock management will include a shortened season of use, periodic rest and and offsite water development."

Steve Lubinski, a seasonal range technician with the Dillon Field Office, worked with the enthusiastic Youth Challenge participants, showing them how to correctly place a log mid-stream and how to find the best place to plant the young willows. As he surveyed their work from the bank, Lubinski said, "Now this will flow year-round. One of the cooler things about this project is that we'll be able to see the effects of this very quickly."

A few weeks earlier, Dillon BLM employees had seeded the area which had been sprayed for cheatgrass the previous autumn. As the mountain sunshine kept the crew warm in the high altitude, everyone expressed optimism that the project would be a success.

But whatever the outcome, Fosse said it was "a good day at the office." As she patted soil around a willow shoot, she added, "This is like working in a postcard."



Steve Lubinski, a seasonal range technician with the Dillon Field Office, tells Reed Pitman, a teen from Deer Lodge, where he'd like to have logs and branches placed in the streambed. *Photo by David Abrams*



Reed Pitman of Deer Lodge, Bryan Nutting of Joliet, and Steve Lubinski, a seasonal range technician with the Dillon Field Office, plant three of 800 willows along a mountain stream in Bell Canyon. Pitman and Nutting were part of a Montana Youth Challenge team assisting the BLM field office with the stream restoration project. *Photo by David Abrams*

Montana Youth Challenge Program Testimonials

Hey Grandpa,

Only fourteen days left until I graduate, I can't wait. Life has been going pretty fast here and I'm on my last day of school. I passed both of my college classes, I'm pretty sure anyway. Home break was pretty cool, thank you for taking me to lunch and getting me some community service. I feel terrible about not seeing grandma, I was going to go over Friday afternoon but I got pretty sick and I spent most of the day sleeping. I hope I get to see her on graduation. I will be planning the big party for JMC next Saturday, it's the biggest party of the year and I cannot wait. I cannot believe this program is almost over, I have grown used to it and I do not know how life will be out of here any more. I'm glad I am going to graduate but I know I will miss this place and a lot of the cadre and cadets. I hope life is going well for you, I hope to hear from you soon, let me know if Christmas Eve dinner is at your house.

Love,
Randy

Wow...Class 17? That is crazy. I was just up late, thinking about my life and how it's so different then it was 5 years ago. I was a partier doing everything wrong a 16 year old could do wrong. And I mean everything. I am now married to a great man, going to college and working as a receptionist for a veterinary clinic in Tacoma, WA. I never dreamed my life could be this good. I can honestly say it's because I made the choice to go to, and stay in Challenge. It was so hard at times but what I gained there is unexplainable. I am confident and can tackle this world using the tools I learned there. I miss my platoon and sergeants so much. ☺ MYCP saved my life.

Cadet F., Class 13

Hey Youth Challenge,

What's going on I never hear anything about anyone in Class 9. But just an update on me I'm in the army. I joined up in 2006. I've been in Fort Bliss, TX since then. I'm getting married in a couple of weeks to a great guy I met down here. I'm also in college right now doing online courses to get my degree. I want to be a CPA. I know the only reason I am where I am now though is because of MYCP and I thank everyone there for that. Thanks challenge and I hope to hear some updates on class 09.

Cadet K.J., Class 9

C.M. called this A.M. to report on his successes. Casey completed his GED and was trained in carpentry at Kicking Horse Job Corps. During his training he spent some time in New Orleans doing some building for the hurricane victims. Presently he is in Big Fork employed as a carpenter and has a girlfriend expecting a baby in September. Casey is pleased with his success and wanted to convey his appreciation to the Challenge staff.

J.M., Challenge Staff

M.B. (Class 7) called to get the number for OPI. He is currently a pilot doing crop spraying and local jobs. He was seeking to contact OPI for his GED information because he is enrolling in college at Idaho State University. His goal is to become a commercial airline pilot, so keep your eyes out for a blond pilot with the last name of B. when you travel. He is also engaged to be married, but doesn't have a date set yet. He shared that his older brother, "Willy" is almost done with college, and is getting his bachelor's degree in Administrative Science. Willy is getting married on May 1st of this year! For those of you who don't know, Willy is our cadet that we discovered a brain tumor in when he was here. Both young men sound like their doing awesome, and he said they thrive because of our program.

J.M., Challenge Staff

Your program accomplished even more than we expected. Because of it, Justin was able to finish school and is prepared to enter the military in March. Justin is currently employed full-time.

Class 15 Mentor

I never thought I would make it to college. I never thought that I would be anything more than a high school dropout. Now I am sitting here in my dorm, and I would like to thank all the CI's that helped me to get where I am now. Thank you everyone.

T.A., Class 15

I graduated from Class 13, oh class thirteen. I miss everyone so much. I never realized how messed up my life was before Challenge to the fullest impact, until I graduated. God knows where I would be if I wouldn't have entered those doors on the Helena Military Base. I was so scared to do it...but I did it. In Challenge I learned teamwork that I will never forget, self discipline that I never dreamed possible, respect for authority and myself, and most of all I gained a confidence that I never thought I could. I am happily married to an amazing husband that I met after moving in with my mentor after graduation. I don't ever desire the life I had before Challenge which is an unexplainable freedom. I say to all who are going to Challenge or who are currently going...be strong. The physical demands are tough and the mental demands intense. But the day I walked with my black robe and cap and shined boots was a day my life changed. And because of Challenge...I was ready for it. I LOVE YOU CLASS THIRTEEN AND CHALLENGE CADRE.

Cadet F., Class 13

This is former cadet O. of Class 16. I never thought when I was under the care of MYCP that I would be writing an e-mail to you. Wow. I just wanted to say thank you for giving me the chance of making my life better in every aspect. Before I enrolled, I was heavy into multiple drugs. I haven't touched a single one since I have been back into the general population. I also wanted to say thanks for not throwing by sorry butt out when I kept getting into trouble. I wanted to let you know that one year and three days after I started my first day in Helena, I moved to Boise, ID. Here I build freeways for \$26 an hour. The overtime is incredible. The confidence that was built in myself during my stay at MYCP was also incredible. I kept in close contact with most of the cadets of Class 16. Some are my best friends even to the day.

J.O., Class 16

I just wanted to touch base with my story since I graduated back in July 2000. My name is T.P. and I owe MYCP everything I have achieved in my life up to today. Upon my graduation, I went directly into the US Navy. I served four years and was able to see the entire world. I completed an Associate degree in Technology and I am finishing a Bachelor's degree in Political Science. I have currently relocated to Texas and am living a wonderful life. I have used the skills and determination that MYCP taught me to become an Account Executive at a national bank. I am now very proud of my adventures and success, and I thank God every day for MYCP and the wonderful staff that assisted me throughout my training program in Dillon, MT. I could not even begin to imagine where I would be now if I had not attended MYCP that year of 2000. I just wanted to extend my gratitude to you program and prove that anything you want in life can be accomplished.

T.P., Class 2

After graduation (June 2005), Cadet F. went to Pullman, WA and lived there with some family members. During this time, he was able to receive his GED and decided to continue his education. He then moved to Missoula, MT where he attended a truck driving school for ten weeks. During that time, he received his CDL license and had many job offers. He decided to move back to Fort Belknap and went to work for the tribe as a utility driver. He works 40 hours a week, makes over \$12 per hour and is still living with his mother but doing extremely well. He still has aspirations of joining the military and is continuing to work on improving his ASVAB score. He wants to join the marines, but so far has not gotten a high enough ASVAB score. He does qualify for the army, but he still has his sights set on the marines. His mother expressed her deep gratitude for what we do here and how we positively influenced her son's life. She said that her son has so much more discipline and is extremely responsible and she believes that all of this is because of Challenge. She feels that the Challenge experience was very positive on his life and in helping him achieve so much more than he ever thought he could accomplish. In closing, she said that he keeps his yearbook out on their living room coffee table and he looks through it at least twice a week. He misses Challenge and the staff who work here.

T.P., Challenge Staff

Dear Director Rouse,

In 2004 my life was headed in a downward spiral; skipping school, drinking, smoking and lying to the ones I loved the most. It was my junior year of high school and I thought that I made the rules. One day in December, I was given an ultimatum by my mother and father; grandma's house in Illinois or the Montana Youth Challenge Program. There was really no question, I worked out things with my high school and started filling out the paperwork. I was accepted and was dropped off at Fort Harrison on January 20, 2005. I was not your average Cadet, and not finishing the program was not an option. MYCP gave me the push to know that I could make it through anything. I believe in this program 110%. It changed my life and gave me what I needed to set goals and get my life back on track.

After graduating from The Montana Youth Challenge Program, I was enrolled back in Capital High School to finish my senior year with my classmates. During my senior year, my mentor and I worked closely to find the next step toward a long term goal. After a few months, I decided that I would apply to the University of Montana - Western. I was accepted and a new chapter in my life was opened. I am a Business major and I plan to complete my BA in December of 2009 and "walk" in the spring of 2010.

In return for all that Youth Challenge has done for me, I am now back and playing a different role on the "other side". I am a part time Cadre instructor; I want to be able to help Montana's youth in the same way it has helped me. This program has given me so much and I just want to give back where I can. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to complete this program; I've come out on top.

Sincerely,

Jessica Warsech
Helena, MT

The reason I came to the Montana National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program was I wanted to go into the military but due to being home schooled the recruiters of all the armed forces said my chances of being able to enlist was low. So they recommended that I apply to the ChalleNGe program which is exactly what I did.

Upon approval of my application I was notified that I would be a class 008 candidate the start of 2003.

With the help and guided ants for five and a half months they taught me the value of leadership/followership, physical fitness and many more.

The leadership/followership was very important to me for what I thought was to be my future; little did I know that everything that I learned was going to be put to the test over the next four years and beyond.

After graduating I returned home to work for two months after that I went to enlist in the military but was sent home due to being three pounds over weight. I took it as a minor set back and kicked up my P.T. {physical training} and while I work on my weight I started my own business which lasted for about a half year when I became very ill for a year and a half.

Late in the year of 2004 I received a call saying that my grandmother was ill and I should come see her. When I arrived my two uncles and mother asked me if I would be willing to move in with my grandmother to be her caregiver on a 24/7 timeline; I agreed to due it. I was with her for ten and a half months until she passed on. Then with in the next year I buried 6 family member and two friends and on top of that I had to deal with my dad's bad health. For me I was laying on the ground and not sure if I could go on at this rate anymore; then I stared to fall back on my training I received at ChalleNGe.

The ChalleNGe program taught me that when I thought that I was through and couldn't go on to pick myself up by the boot straps and carry on for tomorrow was a new day.

After being a graduate of the program for four years I realized a new chapter was starting in my life and it was going to involve

youth which is funny as my dad had worked with at risk youth before.

What better way to do that then to work for the program that helped me. If it helps one youth as much as it helped me it's worth it.

Now that I'm back with the Montana Youth ChalleNGe Program as a Cadre Instructor I know we have made a difference for the youth of now and generations to come; for it's not my future that matters but those to come: others before self.

Class 008 Graduate

Elizabeth P. Maxey

Elizabeth P. Maxey

January 23, 09

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate from the second class of the Youth Challenge Program. I am writing this letter to show my appreciation for all that the Youth Challenge Program has done to help me improve my life. Before the Program I was an angry teen with no future and nothing to care about. I was smoking, drinking, and experimenting with weed. Thanks to Youth Challenge I gained the confidence and the knowledge that I could do anything I wanted to, so long as I put in the effort. Because of that knowledge and the encouragement of the Youth Challenge instructors I went on to a four year stint in the Navy. In my four years in the military I saw parts of the world I would only have been able to dream of. I thank the Youth Challenge for giving me that opportunity. I will not say that the Youth Challenge cured me of making mistakes. I have made plenty since graduating. But, if it weren't for the Program I would have had no future worth mentioning at all. I am now a Sophomore at Western Montana University. I am an aspiring writer, working on a Bachelor's Degree in Writing and Literature. I am generally an A/B student. I would likely be racking up a fair amount of debt in school loans if it weren't for the four generous Youth Challenge Scholarships I have received. If I can be of further assistance, please call me at (406) 988- 0119.

Sincerely,

Christine Longacre
Class 02, MYCP

SUCCESS STORY OF TAZ FLYNN

January 23, 2009

Taz J. Flynn.... A True Success Story

Our son graduated from the Montana Youth Challenge program in June 2006. I would like to personally testify to the unlimited opportunities which our son has had since attending the Montana Youth Challenge program. Taz has completed his GED while in the program and upon his return has completed his High School requirements to graduate along with his class. Taz is currently enrolled in the U of M and is now attending college. The foundation our son received through this program is irreplaceable. Prior to completing the Montana Youth Challenge Program our son was a lost individual who felt as if there was no future for him. Through an awesome staff Taz's prospective on life has changed, he became someone who had a place in this world. It did not come easy for our son he had to really work hard through a lot of blood sweat and tears.

Our story of our son is well known in our community as a true success story, I have parents of troubled youth constantly contacting and asking me about the Montana Youth Challenge Program.

I would highly recommend the Montana Youth Challenge program to any struggling youth and to the Parents of any struggling youth. The Staff is highly qualified, professional, and they truly care about the Youth in Montana and make it their mission to help as many kids as they can succeed.

Sincerely;

Mike & Brooke Flynn

I always thought I wanted to go to college and I had always planned on going, but as the years went by in high school I felt I would never get there. I had no self-confidence and no drive to accomplish anything both in and out of school. I felt that I was going to be stuck in a little town with no future leeching off of my parents for the rest of my life. I needed a change and it needed to happen fast, so I signed up for the Montana National Guard Youth Challenge Program.

After graduating from MYCP I had trust in myself that I had never had before. I knew I could do anything that I wanted to when I put my mind to it. This program has given me opportunities that I never would have been able to have otherwise. I received a scholarship that I have put towards my first year of college and I now have the skills to do homework, turn assignments in when they are due, and get to class on time every day. I now have the confidence to succeed at whatever I want to do, whether it involves a job, school or dealing with my friends and family.

Even when things aren't going so well for me, I still believe in myself. I don't believe I am less than anyone else and I keep on going no matter what. I can also handle other people much better now. I am not as reserved as I used to be. I couldn't even walk into a bank and talk to someone without being nervous. Now I can speak in front of people with my head held high and not be worried about what they think of me.

Without the Youth Challenge program, I would be lost. I would be the girl with no self-confidence who isn't going anywhere in life. It has given me a future, and for that I will always be grateful.

Debra R. Pearce

April 23, 2013

AFF: Helena, MT

When I attended the Montana Youth Challenge Program I thought that was the end of the road for me, but then that soon turned around for me. If I wouldn't have went to Challenge I would have just gone home and started getting in more trouble and probably would have started experimenting with other forms of eating disorders and even drug use. This form of activities would have prevented me from becoming the person I am today if it weren't for Youth Challenge.

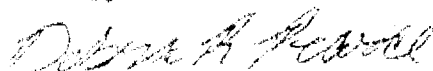
The staff at Challenge showed me to manage my life; also they showed me what was good and bad and how to make real life choices. They prepared me for the job world. They taught me how to make my own resume for the work force and taught me how to score a job with great interview techniques. They helped me achieve my GED, and made me finally realize what I was actually capable of doing. Not only were they there for supervision, they were also there for moral support as well. I am glad the CI's were there to help me cope with being away from my family.

I am now a PFC in the ARMY NATIONAL GUARD. I've already completed basic and AIT, graduating in the top of my class. I plan on making a career in the Army. I now am currently a student at The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology. I am enrolled in the Diesel Technologies program. Since I've been home from basic and AIT I've been able to move out of my parent's house and even purchase my own vehicle.

I'm glad my parents made the choice for me to attend Youth Challenge. If I hadn't of gone my world would have fallen apart in front of me. I believe that The Montana Youth Challenge program is what turned my world around, and without it I can guarantee I wouldn't be making the wise decisions that I am making today. I hope that Youth Challenge will still be around fifty years from now because I know that if this program stays around, that there will be many more positive success stories to come.

Sincerely,

Debra R. Pearce



Hi.. My name is Zareena. I hear that this paper that I am writing is going to be read to the legislature on Monday, January 26. I am writing this paper to let everyone know of what I learned from the Montana Youth Challenge program and how it has changed my life since being there. I also want to take the time to thank you for putting this program together and for having great teachers, cadre, and other staff for making this program a success.

The Montana Youth Challenge Program changed my life in many ways. Being at MYCP, I learned that people just can't do things their own way. They need help in many ways and others, peers and elders, who will support them. Also, the cadre kept the students in order and made them see that they can do things that they thought they never could do. The Montana Youth Challenge Program gave me a second chance to get better grades and gave everyone else a second chance to go on the right path and live a better life.

Since graduating from MYCP, I have been taking an online class to catch up on classes I failed in high school and I registered to take the ACT on February 7. I have been more responsible at home; doing community service work at the Florence Crittenton Home and volunteer at my previous elementary school. I also go everyday to Curves to workout and try and loose weight and have taken my drivers learning permit. Most important, I learned how to stick up for myself if someone wants to put me down.

I am happy that I went to MYCP, because I didn't just learn that obtaining good grades is all that matters in life. What matters is that you have support from your loved ones, friends, peers, elders, and that you believe in yourself that you can do anything that you put your mind to.

I appreciate that all the legislative members are reading this or hearing someone read this and I just want to say, "Thank you for changing my life. I know that I will be successful and I know that I have the support from all the people who helped me change." My last words are from a saying that I made up while being at the Challenge program. "Don't lose sight of your dreams or the people who care. If you do, you will lose sight of your path to success and a better life." Thank you.

Hello,

My name is Jalyssa Johnson. I recently graduated from the Montana National Guard Youth Challenge Program on December, 20 2008. It is so hard to describe in words, how much this program has changed my life for the better.

Before MYCP my life was headed to nowhere. I was not a good student at all, I am sure none of the teachers enjoyed having me in their class. I attempted to play basketball, but at every game I would get upset and end up tripping the opposite team's players. I never finished a game because I would foul out. At home, life was no better than school life. Actually, home life was the worst of them all. I would constantly lie and yell at my mom. Not a night would go by that wouldn't involve some sort of fighting.

On the day of July, 22 2008 I walked into the arena at the University of Montana-Western thinking that I would go to the program and just simply, casually walk through the program and graduate at the end. But as soon as we stepped on that bus, it all hit me; for the first time in my life I would actually have to work to achieve what I wanted. That was the toughest thing for me, all my life I have been the girl who just starts a sport and excels at it immediately.

The day of graduation was amazing, not only because I graduated, but also because, I had for the first time, worked for something that I had actually wanted. When I arrived back at school many people tried bringing me down. But I didn't let them because I would remember that I had worked for it. Teachers would come up to me in the halls and tell me "Jalyssa, you look so much better", or "Jalyssa, there is just a glow to you now". Hearing that was awesome, I could then walk down the halls with more confidence.

I am now actually a good student, something I thought I would never have been able to see myself as. Now the teachers actually like having me in their classes. I can contribute all this success to the Montana National Guard Youth Challenge Program.

Thank You,

Jalyssa Johnson

Tough program turns teen's life around

Published: Saturday, December 20, 2008 9:46 AM CST

By KRISTI ALBERTSON/Daily Inter Lake

Today, Mathew Swartz is the pride of Marion.

After five grueling months in the Montana Youth ChalleNGe, Swartz will graduate from the program today. His time there has transformed the 16-year-old from a shy, unsocial, constantly-in-trouble teen to a confident cadet.

While never exactly a "bad" kid, Swartz wasn't on a good path six months ago. He was smoking, hanging out with the wrong crowd and frequently in trouble with his parents.

Most of the problems with his parents stemmed from Swartz's tendency to hole up in his room and avoid doing the schoolwork his mother and home-school teacher, Deidra, assigned him.

"He just kind of stayed in his room and didn't do a whole lot," Swartz's father, John, said. "He was on the computer a lot, on the Internet, playing a game, for hours at a time."

Swartz didn't like to be around people, and the friends he had were anything but a positive influence, he said.

"I wasn't exactly on the straight and narrow. I decided I needed to change," he said. "I was not exactly doing anything productive with my life."

He can't remember how he found out about the Montana Youth ChalleNGe Program in Dillon, but he thought it seemed like a good option, maybe his only option. The program, sponsored by the National Guard and the state of Montana, provides at-risk youth a structured, disciplined environment in which they can work on GED and college classes and learn how to be productive citizens.

Swartz already had tried simply avoiding the friends who negatively influenced his life, but that hadn't worked. He considered getting back into public school, but slacking off in home-school classes had put him about a year behind his grade level. The Youth ChalleNGe program seemed the best way to get his life on track.

John and Deidra Swartz weren't so sure, however. They dreaded the long months they wouldn't see their son and worried how he would do in the disciplined environment. Eventually, however, they gave him their consent.



Mathew Swartz will graduate today from the Montana Youth ChalleNGe program, which he credits with changing his life. "I wasn't exactly on the straight and narrow. I decided I needed to change," he said. The program, sponsored by the National Guard and the State of Montana, provides at-risk youth a structured, disciplined environment in which they can work on GED and college classes and learn how to be productive citizens.

"And right at the end, you tried to back out," his father reminded him.

Swartz laughed and nodded. „Aeul realized how long I was going to be gone. I just got cold feet."

He didn't back out, however, and on July 22, he left for Dillon. His parents were allowed a brief goodbye; then Swartz was on his own.

His first two weeks in Dillon were spent in the "prechallenge" portion of the program, when would-be cadets were evaluated to see if they made good Youth Challenge candidates and were introduced to the program.

"It was 10 days of no talking," Swartz said.

It was also 10 days of wondering who the other youths in the program were and whether he had made a huge mistake.

"I don't know what I'm doing here," Swartz remembers thinking at that time. "Why did I really come to this place? Am I going to make it?"

After making it through the prechallenge, he started the intense program. His days were packed with school, military drills and workouts.

The classes went better than Swartz expected. When he first arrived, he wasn't sure he'd earn his GED before graduation. But Swartz was one of the first cadets to pass the test, which allowed him to enroll in two college-level courses. He graduates today with four college credits.

He also took a leadership position, one of the program's graduation requirements. Swartz's first leadership role was as platoon leader.

He had to march his platoon of 30 teens and put them through drills in confined spaces. It was a nerve-wracking experience for the kid used to spending his days hiding in his room to find himself the center of attention.

But he did better than he'd expected, which led him to apply to become company commander. The role is similar to that of platoon leader, Swartz explained, except the company commander is in charge of twice as many people. He was chosen from about 12 applicants for the job.

"As company commander, I make sure everyone is taken care of," Swartz said. "If someone has a medical appointment and can't make it to school, the commander makes sure the cadet gets a meal."

He has to know where everyone in the company is and make sure they're all doing their jobs. If one of them isn't, Swartz takes the fall.

"When someone else messes up, you get in trouble," he said. "But it's fun. Before, I didn't really get to know people. It keeps you on your toes, having to keep track of everyone."

It's a very new experience for Swartz.

"I used to not be a people person. I would hide," he said. "Now I get up in front of people. That's very much different."

Other people see the change, too. Swartz returned to the Flathead Valley for a break during the week of

attended on Sunday. "I was the first time they had seen Swartz since he'd left for the program, said David Goyer, who attends the church.

"You could see the pride in their eyes," he said. "Now that's cool."

Goyer wasn't entirely unprepared for the change he saw in Swartz. Before Swartz left for the challenge, he had asked Goyer to be his mentor. Cadets are required to meet with their mentors four times a month for one year after graduation.

"I get to be his parole officer," Goyer joked.

"I make sure there's no slipping. It's good to have that support. I wish I'd had it when I was a teenager."

Swartz plans to return to the Flathead after today's commencement ceremony. He will work at Cardinal Hardware and take classes at Flathead Valley Community College. In a few years, he may join the U.S. Navy; he'd like to be a field medic.

Having the confidence to pursue those dreams is perhaps the biggest change the program wrought in Swartz.

"I did not have very much self-esteem," he said.

That's very different now, John Swartz said, pointing to his son's straight posture and the way he looks people in the eye.

"He's realizing his potential now. He's excelling in everything he's doing," John Swartz said. "He didn't see his worth. The program has really brought that out in him."

Reporter Kristi Albertson may be reached at 758-4438 or by e-mail at kaj-bertson@dailyinterlake.com

Copyright © 2008 - Northwest Montana Daily Inter Lake

Finding the path to a brighter future...

Boulder teen credits youth program for turnaround

by Jan Anderson, editor

When 2008 opened, Nicky Mann was headed nowhere fast. Into drinking and drugs, the failing high school sophomore had little respect for herself and others.

Now, as the year draws to a close, she has made a 180 degree turn. She has her GED, scored well on college entrance exams, and is taking college courses.

Even her physical appearance shows her new pride. She has lost 27 pounds, won a national physical fitness award, and cleaned up her act in terms of personal hygiene.

Best of all, the sixteen-year-olds face beams, she meets questioners eye to eye and she expresses confidence that her future is going to be far different from her past.

"My world revolved around getting high every day...It just seems like the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life," says Mann.

She credits her time with the Montana Youth Challenge Program for the changes.

Although she is still close with

"My world revolved

around getting high every day...It just seems like the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life."

Nicky Mann, who will graduate from the Montana Youth Challenge Program Dec. 20

some of the Jefferson High staff who tried to help her and shared the joy of her newfound success with some of them when home in Boulder for Thanksgiving, Mann says she was sinking at public school. "There are kids that just don't fit that mold," she says.

In contrast, the staff at the MYCP in Dillon were part of her life 24-7. No matter what time of day or day of the week, she could and did turn to them for support. "They're protective of us. They encourage us," she says.

That encouragement will continue as Mann crosses the stage December 20 to accept her military school diploma from MYCP – and after. A mentor in the community of Boulder will serve as See MANN, p. 5



Nicky Mann, left, says she was headed in the wrong direction before she voluntarily joined the Montana Youth Challenge Program, where she met mentor Vanessa Brown. Brown will be guiding Mann through the next year. (Photo by Jan Anderson)

MANN: changing future courtesy of Montana program, from p. 1

Mann's confident and cheerleader as she starts to make her way in the outside world.

"I'm not supposed to be like a parent...I'm there to listen," says mentor Vanessa Brown.

Brown explains it clear that she expects Mann to succeed. "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure she's successful," says Brown.

She adds, "I'm really excited for the next year."

When Nicky Mann entered the MYCP, a program developed by the Montana National Guard, she had weighed her chances down to almost nothing, she recalls. "I was pretty much down to two options,"

Riverside (Youth Correctional Facility) or MYCP, says Mann.

The program in Dillon, with the slogan "A better Montana, one youth at a time," was designed to help at-risk youth develop skills and attitudes necessary to become productive citizens. Participants must be high school dropouts between age 16 and 18, drug free Montana residents able to pass a physical exam. They must also have never been convicted of a felony and cannot be on probation.

There is no charge to the students or their families for participation in the voluntary program.

While in the program, the youths are encouraged to focus on physical, mental, emotional and educational goals. They also receive leadership training, breaking the links to a history of being

within the ranks.

Once finished, the participants are boosted by a mentor who makes sure they are either in continuing education, the job force or the military.

Though several of her MYCP classmates plan to enter the military, for Mann, the plan calls for working for a few months to raise money to start college in the fall. She says the time management skills and self-discipline she learned in the program will help her remain responsible and focused.

Not everyone who enters the program makes it through, says Mann, noting that out of 98 who started in her company, only 61 remain. There were plenty of challenges, and a fair share of tears from time to time, but the hardest part, she says, was "truthfully, living with sixteen girls."

Anxious to start her new life, Mann spent part of her Thanksgiving break submitting job applications. Writing resumés and cover letters and filling out job applications were among the skills taught at Dillon, she says.

She also will be working to live differently from in the past. Some of her friends from the past are still in the picture, but many will not be, she says. The ones who are still into drugs and drinking will get merit a space in her life, says Mann.

Thank you, what I used to do, and

"It's not worth my time to get back into that," Mann says. She is interested in making sure they hear the message of her changes and perhaps recognize an open door for themselves, she says.

Her former friends who are going nowhere are not the only concern for Mann. She has expanded her view and knows that there are things she can do to improve the community around her. While home for the holidays, she gave back, helping to the entrepreneur barn and assisting the Toys for Tots preparations.

Perhaps the biggest change in Mann's life, though, will come in terms of her relationship with her family.

"I was an 'it's all about me' kind of person," she recalls.

"I've realized my mom's a completely different kind of person than I thought she was," says Mann. "She's been nothing but supportive."

Mann's willingness to accept that parental support now has already influenced the young woman's path. Initially planning to enter college in January, she talked with her mother and decided that raising money for a while and starting in the fall would be a better move, she says.

After all, she says, her mother has her best interests at heart, and college is expensive. Somehow she will work for the money and find a motivation to do it.



A set of two male platoons stand at attention at Fort Harrison during a recent outside training session of the Montana Youth Challenge program of the Montana Army National Guard. Jon Ebbett IR Staff Photographer

Finding a new direction

By ALANA LISTOE
IR Staff Writer

Trisha Griffin's life changed after the death of her sister Shandi in 2005.

She dropped out of a school that was headed for trouble. "The school wasn't doing anything for me," she said. "I didn't get along with the kids and wasn't motivated."

Griffin says things began to change from there.

She returned to high school after a past fall to give it another try, but she says it just didn't work for her.

She grew up a lot (with the loss of her sister) and didn't fit in, Griffin said.

Griffin, of Helena, 16, lost her sister Shandi, who was 18-years-old at the time and the mother of an infant.

Shandi suffered a gunshot to the head and died from her injuries surrounded by her family and friends in her home days later after the incident.

It's a time for change in Griffin's life as she recently graduated from candidate status to full status with the Montana Youth Challenge Program. Griffin said she was visiting her grandmother in Great Falls



Members of the female platoon give Sgt. Perry Fosse their full attention. Jon Ebbett IR Staff Photographer

when she heard a radio advertisement about the program. She got online and visited the program's Web site, printed out the application and handed it to her mother.

"We sent it in and here I am," she said with a smile during a recent interview.

Griffin stands tall and appears proud of her accomplishments since joining the volunteer program for teens between the ages of 16 and 19.

"It has been really good for

me," she said. "I like it here. I'd rather be here than at home. Here, I know I can't get away with things."

The MYCP aims to reach students who would otherwise fall through the cracks of traditional education. The 22-week residential program at the University of Montana - Western in Dillon is

Jon Ebbett IR Staff Photographer
Sgt. Martin Osbourne holds court during marching drills for the current class of the Montana Youth Challenge.

followed by a year-long mentoring program sponsored by the National Guard and the State of Montana.

This is the 15th class since the program was launched in 1999 graduating 1,045 cadets. The first two weeks are known as the pre-challenge phase and are held at Fort Harrison.

The program is not for those who have committed felonies or tested positive for street drug use.

It is free to parents and students who attend as it is funded through federal and state dollars.

MYCP's core components

More CHALLENGE, page 8A



Challenge

continued from 1A

include academic excellence, life coping skills, job skills, health and hygiene, responsible citizenship, service to the community, leadership and followership as well as physical fitness.

This full spectrum of learning gives students the life skills they need to become productive in society, as well as academia like math, science, social studies, literature, arts, and writing.

Josh Rouns, 24, of Lewistown, graduated from the program in 2000 and recently went back to talk with candidates about hanging in there when things get hard.

Rouns dropped out of high school, started drinking which landed him in trouble and in front of a judge who told him about MYCP.

"It has given me the world," Rouns said. "If it wasn't for this program I'd still be in Lewistown and wouldn't be driving a nice pick-up or have the experiences I've had."

After graduating Rouns joined the Army National Guard and returned from serving in Iraq a year ago. He is now attending the Uni-



Jon Eboft JR. St

Former Montana Youth Challenge graduate Josi stopped in recently to offer words of advice for the class.

College of Technology studying to be a diesel mechanic.

Rouns now financially donates to the program because he believes it is "the greatest program ever."

MYCP Director Reid Lund says the whole key is the program is voluntary, and those in it are welcome to leave at any point,

The first couple are the hardest a coming off from others suffer from seriously home si

Those in the program aren't allowed to or have caffeinated ages.

"They start a r said. "So it's real for them. These a

Story available at <http://billingsgazette.net/articles/2007/12/31/news/local/20-mngycp.txt>

Published on Monday, December 31, 2007.

Last modified on 1/2/2008 at 3:08 pm

Troubled Billings teen completes Montana National Guard Youth Challenge Program

By DIANE COCHRAN
Of The Gazette Staff

There's a lot Cala Reichert doesn't remember, like whether or not she finished the fifth grade or how old she was when she realized her little sister was a mistake.

But she remembers plenty.

She remembers the first time she saw her mother sober, a night when it was just the two of them at home and they ate spaghetti for supper. Cala was in grade school.

Fighting back

She remembers the time she jumped onto her stepfather's back and hit him and hit him and hit him until he let go of her mother.

She remembers watching her sister run out of the house and all the way to school with no pants on because their mother had slammed her head into a wall.

Not long after that, Cala's mother relinquished her parental rights.

"She told me she couldn't take care of me so she had put my sister and me up for adoption," Cala said. "I thought she just wanted to get rid of me."

It would be almost seven years before Cala, who was molested in foster care, arrested three times for assaulting her adoptive mother and sent to live for months at a time in residential treatment centers, would come to understand that she was not fundamentally unlovable.

"In a lot of words, (my mother) basically told me she didn't want me," Cala said. "When she told me that, I gave up. I gave up on anyone wanting a child who had been through the stuff I've been through."

Now 17 and a graduate of the Montana National Guard Youth Challenge Program in Dillon, Cala is, for the first time, thinking seriously about her future.

She plans to join the National Guard after she turns 18 next spring, go to cosmetology school and eventually study to be a social worker or a foster parent.

Sharing her story

She wanted to tell her story because she knows there are other children who feel as hopeless as she once did.

"Not everything is hopeless," Cala said. "Even though it might feel hopeless, it's not."

When she moved in with Angie Reichert, the woman who eventually adopted her, Cala was 12 years old but had the mental and emotional capacity of a kindergartner.

Like many children in chaotic situations, Cala stopped progressing developmentally when her environment became unpredictable, said Kelly Christy, a counselor at Yellowstone Counseling Center who treated her for five years.

Cala had post-traumatic stress disorder and did not trust anyone, especially adults, Christy said.

"It was not a real good prognosis for her," Christy said.

Cala's birth parents split up before she was old enough to attend school. She and her sister, who is one year younger, lived with their father until his wife beat them and they were removed from the home.

Cala was a first-grader when the girls moved in with their birth mother.

"She was constantly shifting boyfriends until she met my step-dad," Cala said. "I don't really know if it was love, but they eventually got married."

Her mother and stepfather drank a lot and smoked pot, which was why authorities removed Cala and her sister from the family's home the first time. Cala thinks she was still in first grade then.

She was in fifth grade when they were removed for good. That was after her sister couldn't find a clean pair of pants to wear to school and her mother banged the girl's head against the wall.

The sisters were separated, and Cala went to live with a foster family in a tiny town near Dillon, where she attended sixth grade in a two-room schoolhouse.

Her foster father molested her.

"He told me no one would believe me, and I would go to jail, too," she said. "I didn't tell anyone."

Years later, Cala did tell someone about the abuse - Reichert, her adoptive mother. Reichert set in motion an investigation that eventually led to the conviction and imprisonment of Cala's abuser.

"At first I thought he would get out and try to find me and hurt me," Cala said. "Now I'm just

glad I did what I did."

She left the abusive foster home after sixth grade because the foster family moved out of state. Cala spent the summer before she started middle school in another foster home in Anaconda.

That's where she was living when Reichert saw her on a television program about children waiting to be adopted.

They met at a pizza parlor in Butte.

"As soon as I saw (Reichert), I just knew. I knew," Cala said. "It was a feeling I got as soon as I saw her. I was just overfilled with joy. I was trying so hard not to cry."

In August of 2002, Cala moved to Billings to live with Reichert. But despite her gut feeling that Reichert was meant to be her mom, it was not an easy adjustment.

Cala was developmentally stunted, and her formative years were filled with violence and betrayal. When things didn't go her way, she threw colossal fits.

"I bit my mom. I scratched her. I punched her," she said. "'m not proud of it."

Still, Reichert, a secretary at St. Vincent Healthcare, adopted her on July 16, 2003.

Reichert eventually began calling the police when Cala got out of control, and the teenager went to jail three times.

At various times, she was placed at the Youth Services Center in Billings, the psychiatric unit at Billings Clinic and a residential treatment center in Butte, where she lived for six months.

"I was trying to push (Reichert) away to see how long it would take her to break down and say, 'Go away,' " Cala said.

While Cala was living at the treatment center in Butte, Reichert considered putting her back into the foster care system.

"Truly, I didn't know if her coming home was an option," Reichert said. "But I just couldn't bring myself to be another person who failed, in a line of people who failed in Cala's life."

Cala made significant progress in Butte, and her transition back home went fairly smoothly.

But she was so far behind in school that she ended up withdrawing from 11th grade. A few months later, on a whim, she signed up for the Montana Youth Challenge Program.

The military-style education program for high school dropouts was a shock for Cala, but she surprised everyone by thriving there. She loved the camaraderie among cadets, a feeling she had not experienced before in her tumultuous life.

Reichert said the camaraderie taught her daughter a vital skill - how to trust. Reichert could not believe the change in Cala, who returned from the five-month program with a new sense of

confidence.

"It's in the way she carries herself," Reichert said. "It helped her see she has a lot of potential."

Cala's serious face comes alive when she talks about the trio of girls at Youth Challenge who became like sisters to her, and she is also animated as she boasts about her physical fitness.

"I can do pushups, and I can do situps, and I can do jumping jacks," she said. "I can run a mile without stopping."

In addition to losing weight and gaining self-assurance in Dillon, Cala earned her GED.

Her longtime counselor, Christy, thinks her future looks bright.

"I think it is very promising," Christy said. "Cala is probably still going to have some troubles."

But if she remains aware of what triggers her outbursts and continues to rely on her support system, she should do well, Christy said.

For her part, Cala does not seem worried about herself anymore. She wants to help other people.

"I just want to say to parents and children who have stories like mine, good luck," Cala said. "The road I went down was not an easy one."

Contact Diane Cochran at dcochran@billingsgazette.com or 657-1287.

